

# Russell on Bolshevism, as Spargo Sees Him

By JOHN SPARGO.

THE rapidly mounting pile of books dealing with Bolshevism from every conceivable viewpoint is most encouraging. Indeed, I am disposed to regard it as the most encouraging fact in the intellectual life of contemporary America. It means that we have shaken off our sloth and are rapidly overcoming our intellectual unpreparedness to meet the grim challenge hurled against us by the champions of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. There are still, I suspect, many persons in this great republic who do not know the difference between Bolshevism and Buddhism, and many more who do not know whether the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is a new disease, like shell shock, for example, or whether it is one of those bothersome diplomatic agreements concerning territorial concessions in the Balkans, Asia Minor, or some other mysterious geographical area.

The number of such persons, however, is very much less than it was a little while ago and is rapidly diminishing. Just as we succeeded in rapidly mobilizing the forces of the nation against German militarism, so we are succeeding in the rapid mobilization of our intellectual forces against aggressive militarist Communism. Democracy, Americanism—ideally the two are synonymous—will be upheld.

Charles Edward Russell is in many respects a perfect exemplar of the highest and best type of American journalism. Sure, but never arrogantly cocksure, serious and well informed, but never ponderous, equally skilled in the use of bludgeon and rapier, he has long been known as one of the most militant foes of privilege and oppression, one of the most valiant champions of democracy. I suppose that there are many Americans who, regarding themselves as "valiant champions of democracy," look askance at Mr. Russell and mistrust him as a dangerous radical. That is due, I suspect, to the fact that they think of democracy as a sort of heirloom bequeathed to us by the fathers, a finished and perfected thing to be carefully preserved, while Mr. Russell, like Mazzini, whom he resembles in many respects, conceives democracy as a living and growing spirit, ever enlarging its sphere.

If Bolshevism merely menaced an institution labelled "Democracy" Mr. Russell would have been quite indifferent to it. He is aroused and enters the list against it because its menace is to the living, pulsing and growing life on which he rests his hope for America and for the world.

In this book, then, Bolshevism is placed on trial, not by a smug, complacent and self-satisfied defender of things as they were in the days of Jefferson, or of things as they are, but by one who has long been in the very forefront of the restless struggle for change and advance. Here is no apologist for our national imperfections and wrongs, but one who has cried his protests against these from the housetops; one who has "muckraked" our civilization with zest and zeal. Even the Bolsheviks themselves, when they would arraign the present order of things, find the weapons of his forging most effective of all in their arsenals. But the great gulf which separates the Bolsheviks and the weapon forger is the fundamental faith in democracy, and therefore in America, which has always inspired the weapon forger. That faith in democracy is feared and hated by the Bolsheviks as they never feared and hated Czarism.

## II.

Mr. Russell's theme is Bolshevism and the United States. If the Bolshevik leaders were content to confine their efforts to Russia, if Bolshevism did not spread beyond the domains of the vast

former empire of the Romanoffs, he might have left it alone, trusting to the Russian people the task of securing their own destiny. But, as he shows very clearly, Bolshevism is confined in no such circle. Its apologists and apostles are everywhere. They desire to have us embrace it here in the land of Lincoln. They would set up here the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. These things inspire Mr. Russell's relentless investigation. He strips Bolshevism stark naked, exposes its essential character and its intentions and aspirations as far as these concern the United States, and then demands of his fellow citizens that they face the challenge.

The story told in these pages in admirable outline is supported by an ample volume of unimpeachable evidence, so that its truth is established beyond question. A "cloud of witnesses," including leaders of the Bolsheviks and their principal journals, establish these facts: When the first Russian revolution overturned the despotism of the old regime the leaders of the movement addressed themselves with sincerity, skill and wisdom to the task of establishing in Russia the foundations of a great democratic co-operative commonwealth.

They were handicapped as the statesmen of reconstruction periods have rarely been. First of all, it was necessary to continue a war which had been entered upon by the old despotic regime, together with an alliance achieved by that old regime, with partners who could not understand the revolutionary reactions of the Russian masses and who made every mistake they could possibly make by their lack of understanding, driving the people of Russia into exactly the temper the statesmen of Germany desired.

History will, I believe, make it quite plain and clear that one of the principal factors in bringing about the overthrow of Kerensky and the consequent inevitable triumph of the Lenin-Trotsky conspiracy was the singularly unintelligent policy of Russia's allies.

Once they succeeded in overturning the Kerensky Government, the Bolsheviks instituted a regime more oppressive, more savagely cruel than that of Czar Nicholas II., and a hundred times less efficient to provide the necessities of life.

Unlike many of those who have written against Bolshevism, Mr. Russell is most careful to establish the competence and trustworthiness of the witnesses upon whose testimony he relies. He is not impartial and does not pretend to be. Anybody who professes impartiality in this great discussion is obviously insincere and untruthful. Mr. Russell's merit lies in the fairness and intellectual integrity with which he presents his case. Not for him are the numerous sensational and unverified newspaper stories of atrocities and crimes. He quotes the official organs of the Bolsheviks and the testimony of witnesses of established repute for whose veracity he can vouch. When one has read and digested the mass of testimony thus offered, the justice of Gorky's scathing summary is realized. "We have exchanged an autocracy of scoundrels for an autocracy of savages," wrote the bitter genius.

The utter incapacity of these reckless experimenters to carry on the economic processes essential to a modern civilized nation is set forth by Mr. Russell with inexorable logic and an amplitude of detailed information for which he is entitled to our gratitude. It is an old cry, levelled tauntingly against the Socialists, that in the Socialist movement there are too many who want to manage the world, while they have not demonstrated their capacity to manage the simplest business. In the days when he was still a Socialist John Burns said to the Social Democratic Federation of England, "You want to manage the affairs of the nation, but you haven't the capacity to manage a wheel stall." Some of the Bolshevik leaders are learned in abstract economics, but useful as that sort of learning unquestionably is, it is impossible to do without that hard practicality which means technical efficiency. All the Bolshevik theories afforded about as good an equipment for organizing and managing the industrial life in Russia and of providing for all that abundance of material well being without which the ideals of socialism can never be realized as would a course of novel reading or a summer of silly flirtations at a seaside resort.

This complete failure of the Bolsheviks to secure economic efficiency was by no means due to the accidental circumstance

that wrong individuals were chosen. The personal equation is of very little moment here. Bolshevism is inherently incapable of producing an ordered, stable and efficient economic life. No one can read the evidence which Mr. Russell has presented here and arrive at any other conclusion. If our Bolsheviks, near Bolsheviks and parlor revolutionists tell us that they deplore the "regrettable excesses" in Russia; that they believe that these can be avoided in the United States, the one effective reply to them is that it can be demonstrated that the Bolshevik theory is incapable of realization in practice except at the cost of the efficiency in production and distribution already attained. Here, in the economic field, as well as in political and social culture, Bolshevism—even if purged of its vile excesses—is a retrogression and not a progression. It inescapably means a return to the ways of the dark and cruel past from which emancipation was gained by so much holy sacrifice.

## III.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Mr. Russell's book is his evaluation of the character and motives of Lenin. Rightly, I think, he acquits Lenin of the charge of corruption which has so often been levelled against him. That Lenin took German money Mr. Russell does not doubt. That he was aware that the Germans hoped to profit from his intrigues and agitation is quite certain. These things were in the nature of the circumstances in which he found himself. Had the circumstances been such that the Allies would have benefited, had they been in a position to profit from his intrigues, he would have acted in precisely the same way, taking their money and trusting to his ability to trick them. But, on the whole, Mr. Russell seems rather to idealize Lenin. True, he guardedly directs attention to his infamous attack upon Maria Spiradonova—an attack which showed that underneath the cold exterior polish of his cynical nature there beats the heart of an unutterable ead and a craven coward to boot. Apart from this revelation, the portrait Mr. Russell gives us is that of a man of great intellectual gifts amounting to genius of the very highest order.

I do not so conceive Lenin. I do not find in his life history or in the whole corpus of his economic and sociological writings any warrant for this high estimate. That he is a man of great talent, possessing a highly trained mind, his writings clearly show. But they also show, I think, that he is almost entirely void of originality or inspiration. He has not a creative mind. As a thinker he is far inferior to the master he so cruelly betrayed, George Plechanov. His preeminence in Russia in this very chaotic period is due less to intellectual greatness than to the absence from his makeup of the customary moral restraints of civilized man. In a still greater degree, perhaps, it is due to the chaos of the time and to the abnormal psychology of the Russian people, in which superstition, ignorance, terror and credulity are inextricably mixed. In a nation of people calmed and disciplined by even one generation of widely diffused education and constitutional political action the mind of Lenin would have been at a hopeless disadvantage in contest with that of Plechanov.

That this is true, an examination of Lenin's philosophical and tactical theories will I believe show. Marx wrote his *Communist Manifesto* in 1847. By 1871 he had come to regard much of it as obsolete and would have let it quietly die, or withdrawn it from circulation if he could have done so. What Marx would have thought today after seventy-two years, we can only conjecture. But we can be quite certain that he would not have clung to the let-

ter of the production of 1847, as Lenin does to-day. The very fact that he insists that the manifesto which was written in the closing years of the first half of the nineteenth century applies to the wholly different world of the present indicates a serious limitation of Lenin's intellect which alone suffices to deny him the great eminence claimed for him.

Take, too, the dogma of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," which Marx developed in the manifesto, though it was not original with him. When Marx wrote there was not a country in Europe, including Great Britain, in which the wage-worker possessed the franchise. The workers were not citizens. This condition of political inferiority and subservience, not less than the absence of property, was included in Marx's use of the term "proletariat." A whole cycle of change has occurred: in every European country the workers have not only gained the franchise, but their representatives have entered the parliaments. Yet, for Lenin, these changes are without significance. There must be no change of policy: no new thinking must be considered or even permitted. Could there be weightier demonstration of intellectual stagnation?

## IV.

I wish that every legislator and every judicial official in the United States could be compelled to read Mr. Russell's book and some means devised to make them understand its most significant pages. In particular, it would be a very wholesome thing if the various investigating bodies created to examine this "red terror" could be restricted in their membership to men and women (I have as yet noted no instance where a woman has a place in any such committee) known to have read this book with understanding. We should then be saved from the folly, and worse than folly, of relying upon drastic changes in the penal code to rid us of the menace of Bolshevism. Such brutal repression as we find advocated almost every day (hysterical abandonment of democratic liberties) will increase the Bolshevik menace, not diminish it.

Bolshevism is the product, mainly, of ignorance, political and economic injustice and oppression and the despair which these produce. The dictatorship of the plutocrat inevitably brings to life the threat of a dictatorship of the proletariat. The one is as bad as the other. Mr. Russell cites the terrible dictatorship of plutocracy at Ludlow, Col., as an illuminating demonstration of this. The remedy is democracy, not only in the political organization of the nation, but in its industry and in its culture.

There is abroad in the world—not only in Russia, but in England and here in America—a profound and growing scepticism of democracy. The reason is not far to seek; it was promised that democracy would prove to be the solvent for all ills, but the ills remain. Of what use, then, is democracy? men are asking. Must we not confess that we have not tried democracy very earnestly yet? We have kept it out of the most important spheres of life, especially of industry and commerce. Here plutocracy rules, safeguarded by our nominally democratic political instrumentalities. Even in politics we have insisted that the structural forms must not be changed, despite changing conditions and a greatly changed and enlarged electorate.

Mr. Russell does not pretend to offer a programme which will eradicate Bolshevism. He does, however, indicate the broad principles which must be made the basis of such a programme. That is one of the many merits of a most admirable book.

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